TWIN CITY LINES

Winter 2023

The photos in this issue follow the interurban east from Hibbing to Gilbert. This is the original west end of the line in Hibbing on 3rd Street at McKinley Street wye, visible at left. This was the south end of the town at that time and near the Duluth, Missabe & Northern depot. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

A half mile from the end of the line was the center of downtown next to the Hotel Hibbing, later the Oliver Hotel. This is the same location as the cover photo.

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P. O. Box 16509
Minneapolis, MN 55416

(952) 922-1096
www.trolleyride.org
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Aaron Isaacs, Editor
3816 Vincent Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55410
612-231-8989
aaronmona@aol.com
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The Minnesota Streetcar Museum operates the Como-Harriet Streetcar Line in Minneapolis and the Excelsior Streetcar Line in Excelsior. Its mission is to preserve Minnesota's electric railway heritage.

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The Range Interurban

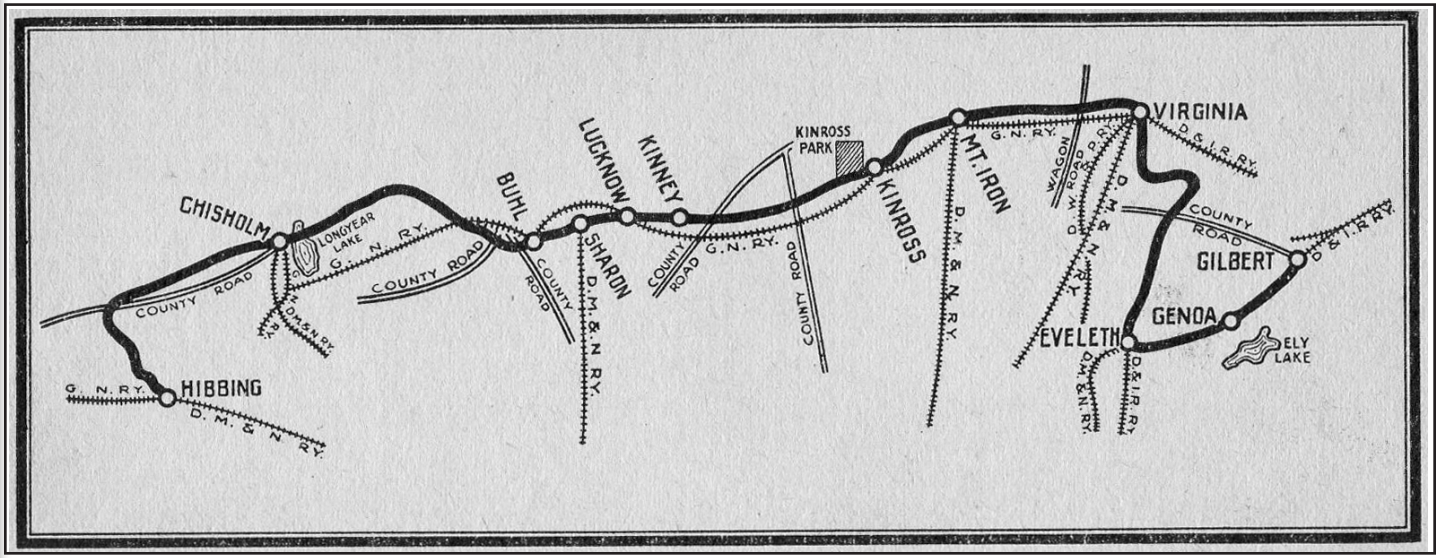
-Russell Olson and Aaron Isaacs

This is edited text from Electric Railways of Minnesota.

The first of the vast iron ore deposits of north central Minnesota called the "Mesabi Range" were discovered by the three Merritt brothers of Duluth near Mountain Iron in November, 1890. The first trainload of iron ore from this mine arrived in Duluth during October, 1892. Mining activity increased rapidly as discovery of high-grade ore deposits continued. The range eventually became the world's largest source of iron ore. Cities and "locations" (as the mining settlements were called) grew rapidly also, the population largely made up of the laborers in the open-pit iron mines. By 1910 the population of the several cities was recorded as Hibbing 8832 persons, Chisholm 7684, Buhl 1005, Mountain Iron 1343, Virginia 13,671, Eveleth 7036, and Gilbert 1700. The total population of the area exceeded 55,000 persons. Although the area was served by a network of steam railroads, none were interested in the passenger business as the ore and lumber tonnage was substantial and profitable. One road did furnish passenger service between most of the important cities but transfers were necessary at junction points on an indirect route and long delays between trains were frequent. There was a natural intercommunication between the "locations" and cities and despite the inconvenient service there was a large amount of passenger traffic. Thus the possibilities for an electric railway through the area were considered excellent.

Two rival groups were seeking franchises from the various cities for an electric railway during 1907. In June of that year it was reported that the Northern Traction Co. of Hibbing had secured franchises in Hibbing, Chisholm and Buhl, while the Mesaba Traction Co. of Virginia had been equally successful in Virginia and Eveleth. Apparently neither company undertook actual construction. The Mesaba Electric Railway Co. was incorporated in November, 1910, and the Mesaba Railway Co. in January, 1911. (It was also reported that the Mesaba Electric Railway Co. was authorized to do business in Minnesota in February, 1912, as a holding company, and acquired all of the capital stock of the Mesaba Railway.) Boston financial interests were the

This map from a 1913 timetable shows the line as originally built, leaving north from the original Hibbing town site. That would change in 1921 when the town was moved south two miles and interurbans headed east, then north to Chisholm.



Front cover: This issue is devoted to the Mesaba Railway, the interurban that ran the length of the Missabe iron range. About 1916, passengers board on 3rd Street in the middle of downtown Hibbing. In a few years the entire town will be relocated two miles south, so the ore under this scene can be mined. Aubin Studio photo, Dick Stoner collection.

After leaving Hibbing, interurbans used this bridge to cross the west end of the Sellers open pit. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

chief investors although many prominent Minnesotans from the iron range communities and Duluth acquired stock). C. E. Thomas was chief engineer during construction of the railway.

The engineering force was organized and began surveying during 1911. Some unusual difficulties were encountered in the construction of the railway although the natural topography was slightly rolling country. Large piles of earth stripping removed from the surface of the open-pit iron mines would have entailed prohibitive grading costs to build through so it was decided to build around them with easy curves and at the same time obtain a reasonable grade line. Numerous sink-holes and bogs made it practically impossible to obtain permanent bearings, and at other points the road was constructed through fields of large boulders. General contractor was the Western Construction Co., also owned by the stockholders of the Mesaba Railway. Grading was performed by John Runquist of Duluth. The Cleveland Construction Co., of Cleveland, Ohio, was the subcontractor for all electrical design and construction. Bridges and trestles were built by the Gallagher Bridge and Construction Co. Laying of rails began early in July, 1912.

The line was built on private right-of-way 50 ft. in width through the rural areas, and in streets through the cities and villages. As the rural population was very small with little or no farming, it was unnecessary to fence the right-of-way. There were few streams requiring bridging and the only waterways of any consequence were a few shallow lakes. Numerous railroad crossings were necessary; crossings at grade were used only where a grade separation was not feasible or railroad traffic was very light. The standard roadway construction involved a 14 ft. roadbed on embankments with 3 ft. ditches on each side in excavation. 6" of gravel ballast, from a pit on the right-of-way, was then placed on which was laid 6" x 8" x 8' tamarack ties, and 70 lb. rail. Initial reports listed 34.80 miles of first main track, 0.90 miles of sidings and 35.70 miles total track. Subsequent reports indicated 35.00 miles of first main track, 0.87 miles of sidings, 0.68 miles of carhouse track, and 36. 55 miles total track.

The 4/0 grooved trolley wire was supported by pipe mast-arms attached to 40 ft. Idaho cedar poles which also carried the telephone, signal, and transmission line wires. Some span wire construction, using wooden poles on right-of-way and steel poles on streets, was erected through Hibbing, Chisholm, Buhl, Virginia, Eveleth and Gilbert.

The power station was located on the property of the Virginia & Rainy Lake Lumber Co. about 1/4 mile from the main track where it entered the city of Virginia. Because of the high cost of coal it was decided to use the waste and refuse from the lumber mill for fuel; water was obtained from a nearby lake. A belt conveyor from the lumber mill fed directly into the filing room of the power station.

The line was originally intended for 1200 volt D. C. operation but before actual construction began it was decided to design the motor-generator sets for 750 volts D.C. and to operate at 600 volts D. C. Shortly after operation started traffic was much heavier than anticipated and it was discovered that the distribution system was barely sufficient to handle the peak traffic. It was then decided to make full use of the designed equipment and the voltage was raised to 750 volts D. C.

A transmission frequency of 22,000 volts, 60 cycle A.C. was selected because the company planned to enter

Above and below: These two views from about 1920 show the construction of the new Hibbing downtown and the rerouted interurban. The location is 6th and Howard, site of the new depot. Iron Range Historical Society collection.

Above: Looking east on Howard Street at 2nd Avenue. Minnesota Historical Society collection.
Below: The Mesaba Railway depot at 6th and Howard.

Left: On the timetable on page 12, this is the "Hibbing Y", end of the line for interurbans from Gilbert and Virginia. The camera is looking south on 1st Avenue, and the wye to Howard Street is at left. Besides turning the interurbans, the tracks on 1st Avenue were only used by the streetcars to North Hibbing. Aubin Studio, Dick Stoner collection.

Below left: The new 1921 alignment from Hibbing to Chisholm required bridging the Great Northern-Duluth Missabe & Northern junction at Emmert Tower. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

into the power and lighting business as well. As of January, 1914, it had contracts with three cities and was in the process of negotiating several others. This voltage was also used by the power plant of the Virginia & Rainy Lake Lumber Co.; a 3 phase line was built between the two switchboards so that each station could synchronize with the other in case of interruption. In addition the main steam headers of each station were connected. A transmission line connected the power station with the substation at Chisholm. Two substations were used to operate the line. A waiting station-substation building was constructed 20 miles west at Chisholm. Two D.C. feeders extended in both directions from the Virginia substation: one to the Chisholm substation and the other to Gilbert. One feeder was installed from the Chisholm substation to Hibbing.

The office building and carhouse were constructed in Virginia. The carhouse building was 86'2" wide and 122'2" long, constructed of concrete foundation, steel frame, and brick walls with a wood roof. Four tracks, with a capacity of two cars each, ran through the building, two of them with a repair pit 56' long situated at one end opposite the repair shop space. The repair shop and storeroom occupied a 20' aisle on one side of the carhouse enclosed with brick partitions. All track entrances were provided with rolling steel doors. A two-story office building measuring 34'10" x 36'0" adjoined the carhouse, containing the general and operating offices of the company.

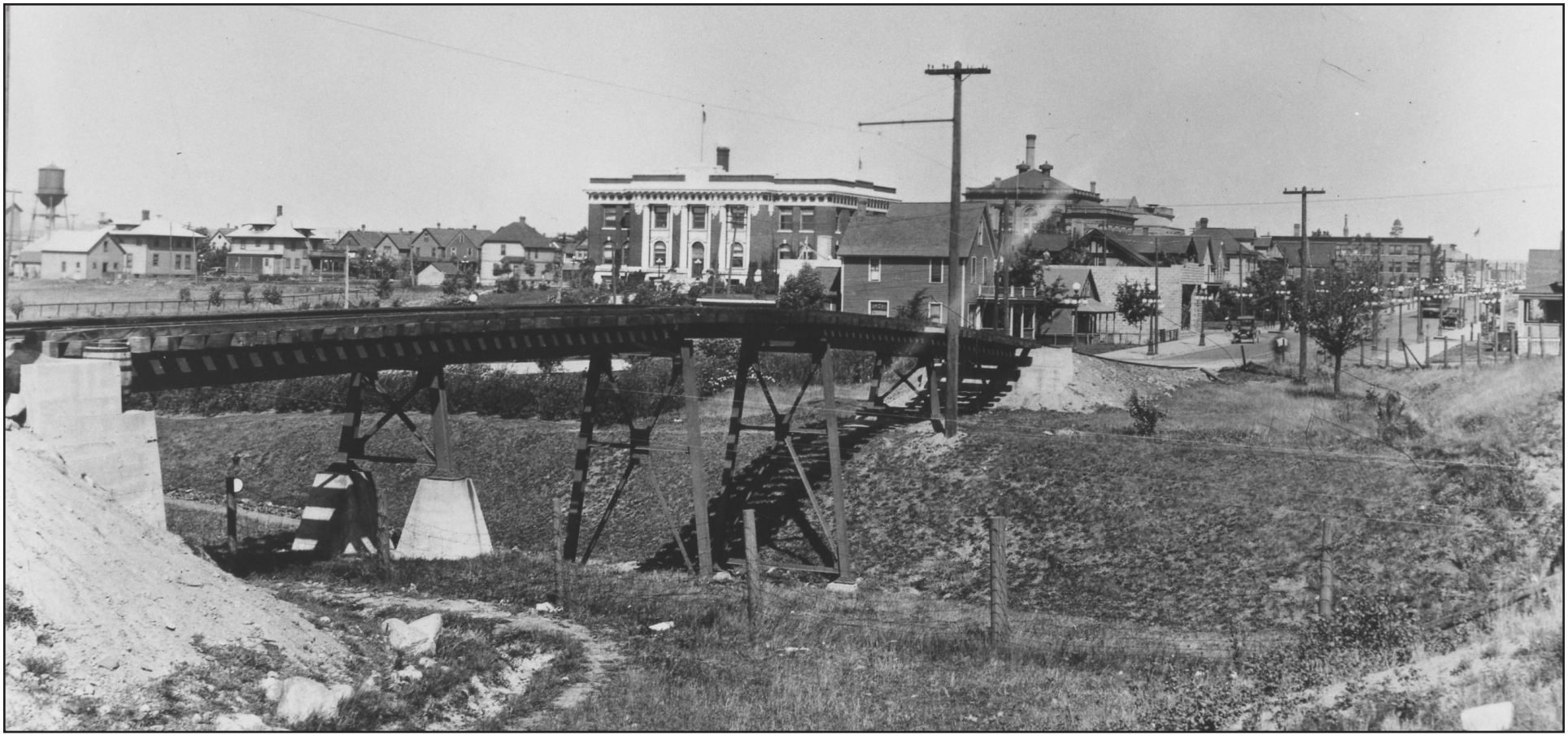
The initial equipment consisted of five passenger motor cars (10-14), five passenger-baggage motor cars (15-19), four passenger trailers (1-4), and two freight-express motor cars (101-102). All were constructed by the Niles Car Co., Niles, Ohio, during 1912.

Left: many of the North Hibbing buildings were moved to the new South Hibbing along 1st Avenue. North East Minnesota Historical Center collection.

Below: The new alignment to South Hibbing incorporated the southern half mile of track in North Hibbing's 3rd Street by extending it south on a new bridge over the Duluth Missabe & Iron Range. Minnesota Historical Society collection.

The Duluth News Tribune of August 16, 1912, reported that the cars were exhibited at the American Electric Railway Association Convention in Chicago during October, then hauled as a special train to St. Paul where Great Northern Ry. took it over for delivery to Virginia. As delivered the cars were painted dark green with tan roofs. This was later changed to a dark red body with black roof.

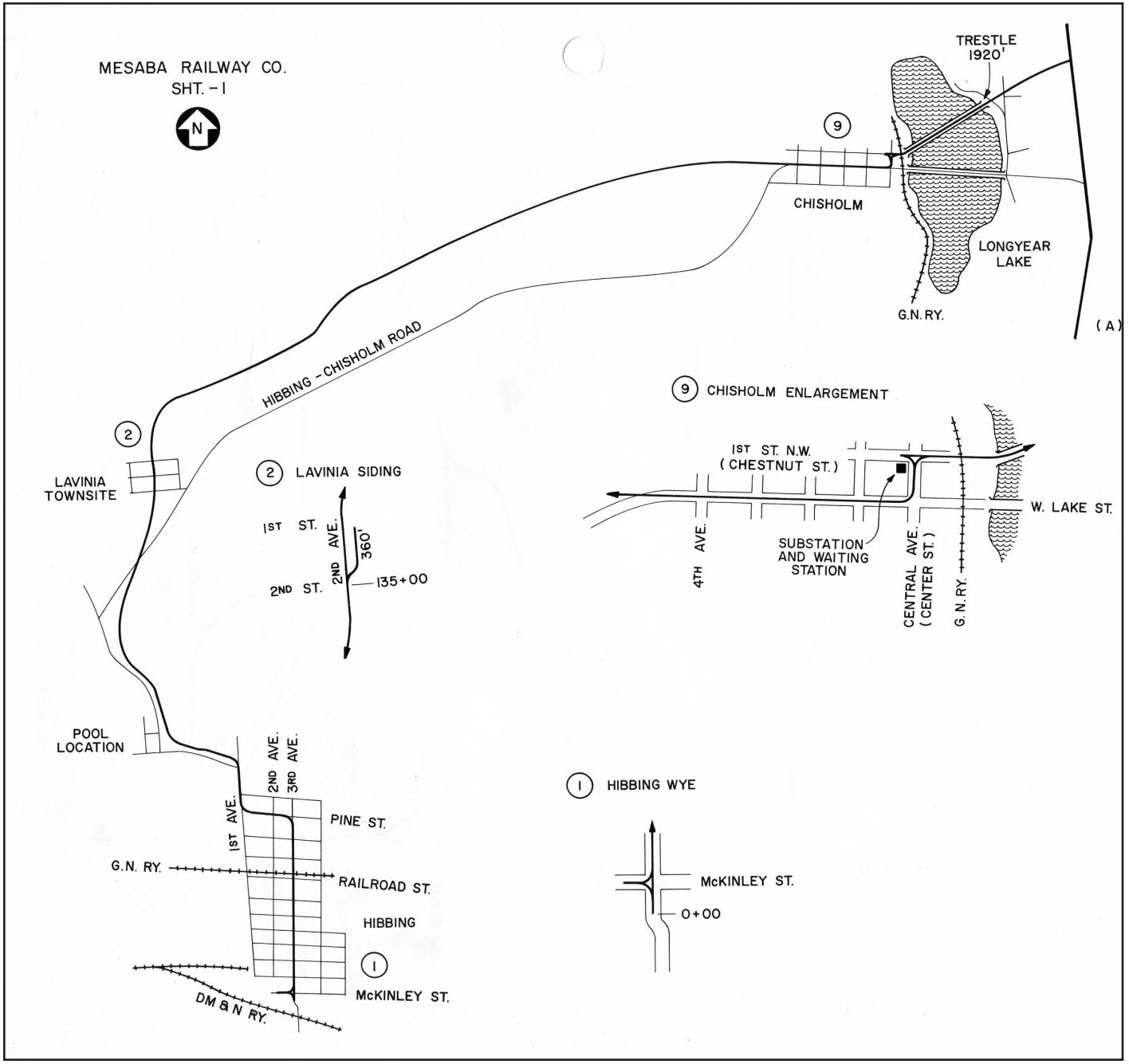
During 1913 one combination line car and snow plow (99) was received from the Wason Mfg. Co., Springfield, Mass. Also during 1913 three former New York elevated trailers (5-7, built by Pullman in 1886) were acquired second-hand to handle the unanticipated



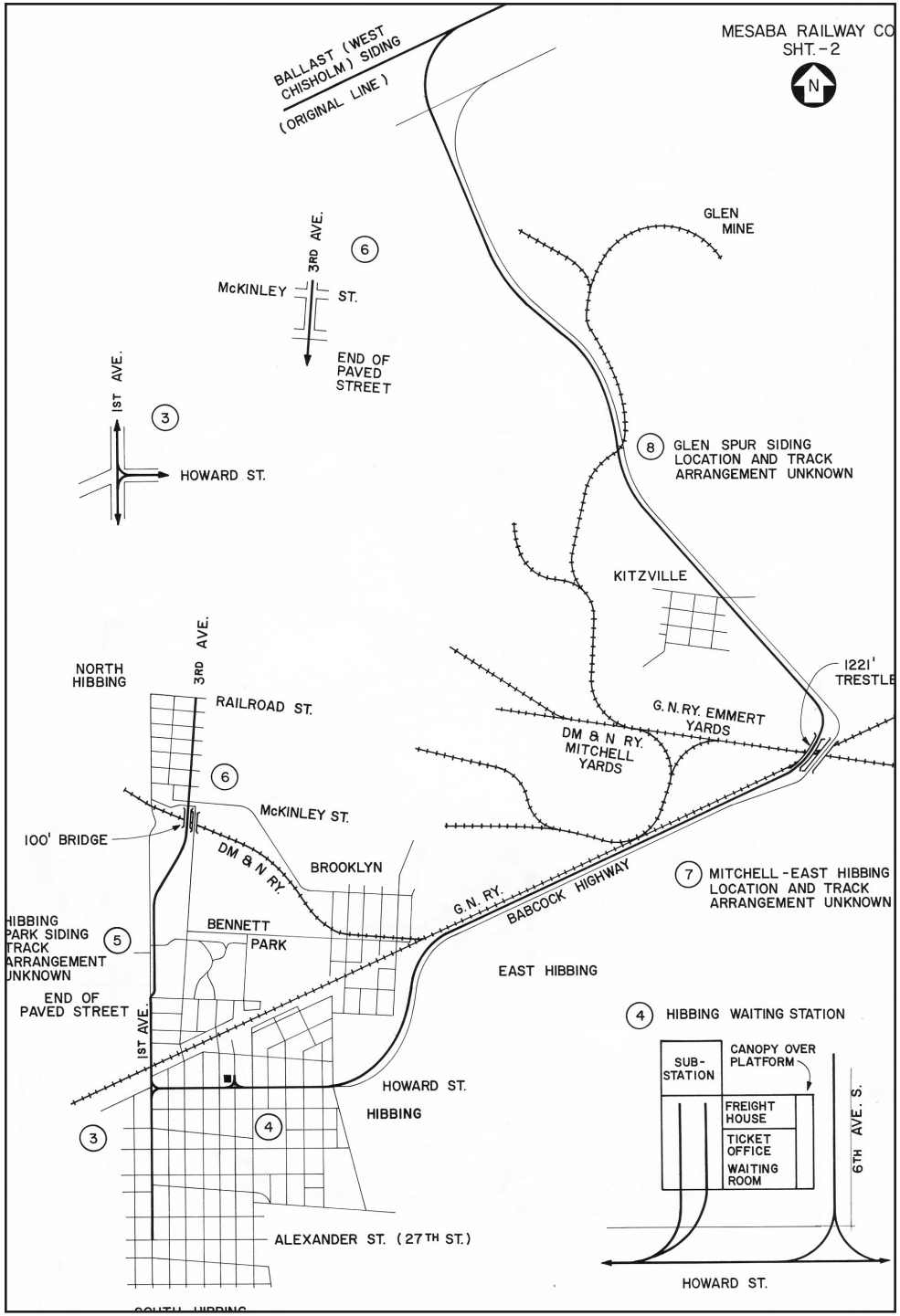
heavy passenger traffic.

The first car to operate over the line began providing hourly service between the Virginia carhouse and Gilbert on December 24, 1912. On Christmas Day two-hourly service was begun between Buhl and Gilbert. On January 22, 1913, regular hourly service from 6 A.M. to midnight daily, was inaugurated over the entire line from Hibbing to Gilbert using 6 cars. As track and equipment were broken in, the running time was gradually decreased from 2 hours 45 minutes to one hour 50 minutes so that the regular hourly service requirements were reduced to 5 cars (February 15, 1913) and finally 4 cars (August 4, 1913). In many instances this service was not adequate and it became necessary to utilize all the passenger equipment the company had to move the traffic. Most of the extra traffic was due to shift changes at the mines; this was handled by two-car trains consisting of a motor car and trailer. Two and three-car trains (motor car and one or two trailers) were run on weekends, holidays and special occasions. The largest proportion of passenger traffic was between Virginia and Eveleth. The carhouse was especially well located to handle this as a trailer could be added to eastbound cars and removed from westbound cars as they passed the carhouse. The Egry train order system was used exclusively and all telephone booths and other points at which orders were received from the train dispatcher (located at the Virginia office building) were equipped with Egry dispatching machines.

Merchandise express service was begun in mid-August, 1913, with two trains in each direction daily except Sunday, carrying general merchandise in less-than-carload lots. Rates charged were approximately 30% above the standard steam railroad freight rates. It



We've reproduced the maps from Electric Railways of Minnesota that show the entire route from Hibbing to Gilbert. These two show the orignal Hibbing-Chisholm route (above) and the reroute that opened in 1921 because of the Hibbing relocation.



North Hibbing is mostly gone in this later view. The motorman is the father of MSM member Dick Stoner. He's in the process of switching trolley poles. Aubin Studio photo, Dick Stoner collection.

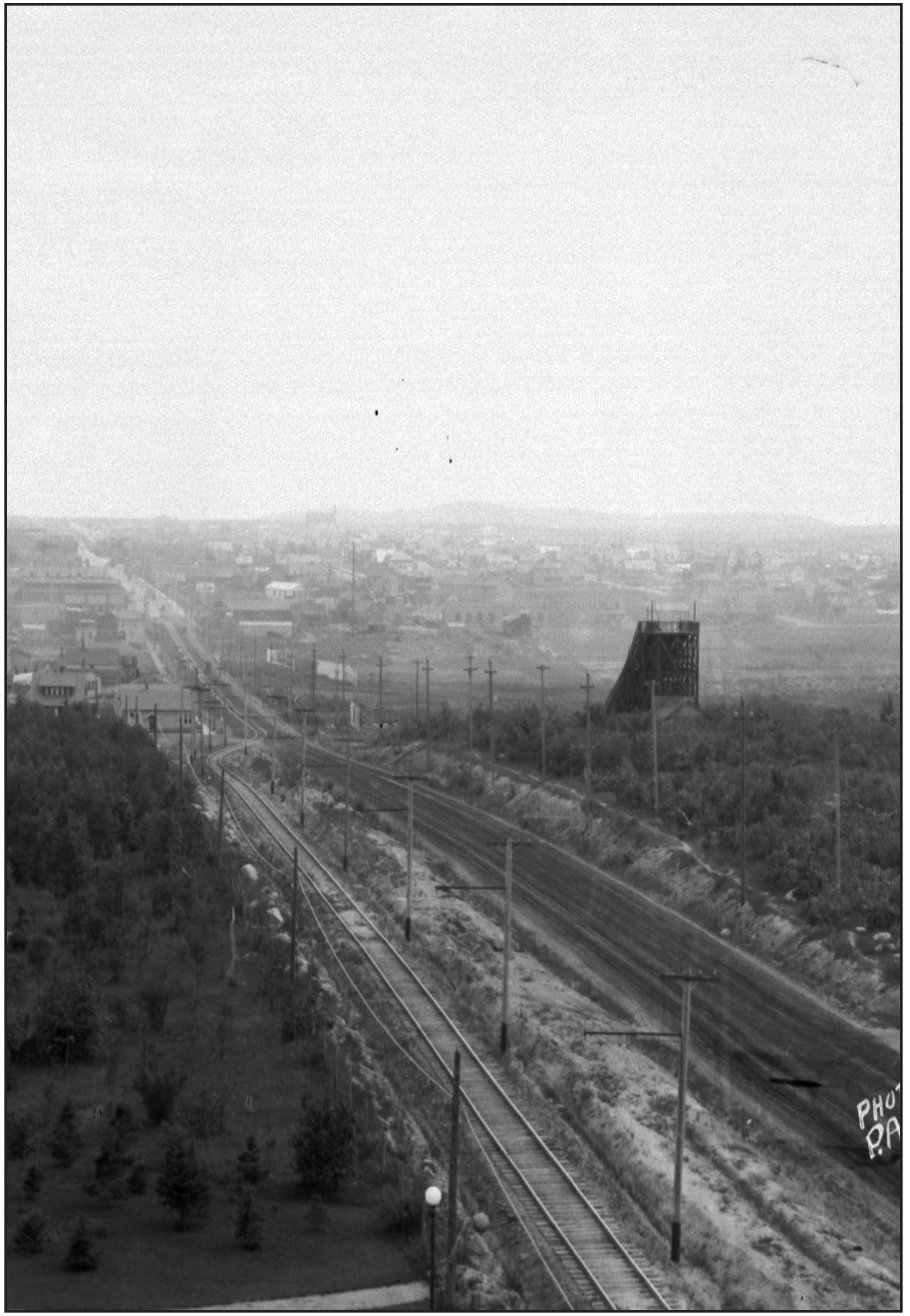
was reported at this time that as the territory served was almost frontier in character, shippers and consumers were just beginning to realize the value of the high quality express service which the company offered.

There were negotiations with the Post Office to carry the mail, but it appears to have never happened.

When the line first opened, the Simmen system of block signals, using home and distant third rails each 70' long, was installed to protect the single track between sidings, which were located at approximately six-mile intervals. Signal lights in the motorman's cab were operated from the third rails by contact shoes mounted on the front truck of each motor car. A directional movement protection fea-

These two panoramas, looking both ways from the same location, show the North Hibbing-South Hibbing streetcar line along 1st Avenue and the relative locatio

ons of both town sites. Aubin Collection, Hibbing Historical Society.



The same area seen from a different angle. This is looking south at the tracks running side of the road, then swinging into the center of 1st Avenue. Note the ski jump at right. Aubin Collection, Hibbing Historical Society.

PASSENGER SERVICE

EAST BOUND

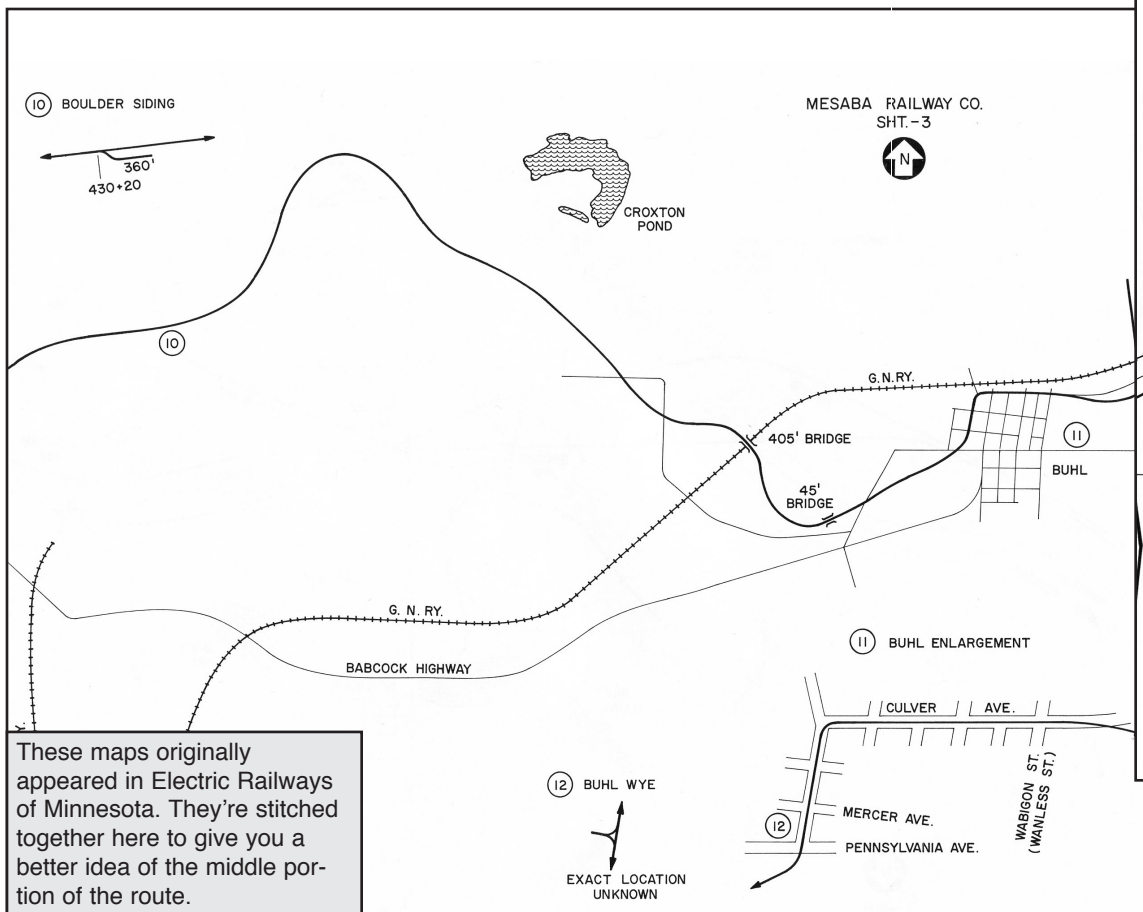
STATIONS	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	noon	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.‡	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.†	p.m.	m.*	a.m.
HIBBING Y Lv.			6 00	7 00	8 00	9 00	10 00	11 00	12 00	1 00	2 00	3 00	4 00	5 00	6 00	7 00	8 00	9 00	10 00	11 00	12 00	1 00
HIBBING			6 03	7 03	8 03	9 03	10 03	11 03	12 03	1 03	2 03	3 03	4 03	5 03	6 03	7 03	8 03	9 03	10 03	11 03	12 03	1 03
LAVINIA			6 12	7 12	8 12	9 12	10 12	11 12	12 12	1 12	2 12	3 12	4 12	5 12	6 12	7 12	8 12	9 12	10 12	11 12	12 12	1 12
CHISHOLM			6 22	7 22	8 22	9 22	10 22	11 22	12 22	1 22	2 22	3 22	4 22	5 22	6 22	7 22	8 22	9 22	10 22	11 22	12 22	1 22
MEYERS			6 27	7 27	8 27	9 27	10 27	11 27	12 27	1 27	2 27	3 27	4 27	5 27	6 27	7 27	8 27	9 27	10 27	11 27	12 27	
CROXTON			6 33	7 33	8 33	9 33	10 33	11 33	12 33	1 33	2 33	3 33	4 33	5 33	6 33	7 33	8 33	9 33	10 33	11 33	12 33	
BUHL		5 38	6 38	7 38	8 38	9 38	10 38	11 38	12 38	1 38	2 38	3 38	4 38	5 38	6 38	7 38	8 38	9 38	10 38	11 38	12 38	
SHARON		5 42	6 42	7 42	8 42	9 42	10 42	11 42	12 42	1 42	2 42	3 42	4 42	5 42	6 42	7 42	8 42	9 42	10 42	11 42	12 42	
LUCKNOW		5 44	6 44	7 44	8 44	9 44	10 44	11 44	12 44	1 44	2 44	3 44	4 44	5 44	6 44	7 44	8 44	9 44	10 44	11 44	12 44	
KINNEY		5 46	6 46	7 46	8 46	9 46	10 46	11 46	12 46	1 46	2 46	3 46	4 46	5 46	6 46	7 46	8 46	9 46	10 46	11 46	12 46	
KINROSS		5 55	6 55	7 55	8 55	9 55	10 55	11 55	12 55	1 55	2 55	3 55	4 55	5 55	6 55	7 55	8 55	9 55	10 55	11 55	12 55	
MT. IRON		6 02	7 02	8 02	9 02	10 02	11 02	12 02	1 02	2 02	3 02	4 02	5 02	6 02	7 02	8 02	9 02	10 02	11 02	12 02	1 02	
HANNA		6 05	7 05	8 05	9 05	10 05	11 05	12 05	1 05	2 05	3 05	4 05	5 05	6 05	7 05	8 05	9 05	10 05	11 05	12 05	1 05	
OLCOTT PARK	5 14	6 14	7 14	8 14	9 14	10 14	11 14	12 14	1 14	2 14	3 14	4 14	5 14	6 14	7 14	8 14	9 14	10 14	11 14	12 14	1 14	
OLIVER SHOPS	5 15	6 15	7 15	8 15	9 15	10 15	11 15	12 15	1 15	2 15	3 15	4 15	5 15	6 15	7 15	8 15	9 15	10 15	11 15	12 15		
VIRGINIA	5 20	6 20	7 20	8 20	9 20	10 20	11 20	12 20	1 20	2 20	3 20	4 20	5 20	6 20	7 20	8 20	9 20	10 20	11 20	12 20		
EVELETH	5 42	6 42	7 42	8 42	9 42	10 42	11 42	12 42	1 42	2 42	3 42	4 42	5 42	6 42	7 42	8 42	9 42	10 42	11 42			
GENOA	5 49	6 49	7 49	8 49	9 49	10 49	11 49	12 49	1 49	2 49	3 49	4 49	5 49	6 49	7 49	8 49	9 49	10 49	11 49			
GILBERT Ar.	5 54	6 54	7 54	8 54	9 54	10 54	11 54	12 54	1 54	2 54	3 54	4 54	5 54	6 54	7 54	8 54	9 54	10 54	11 54			

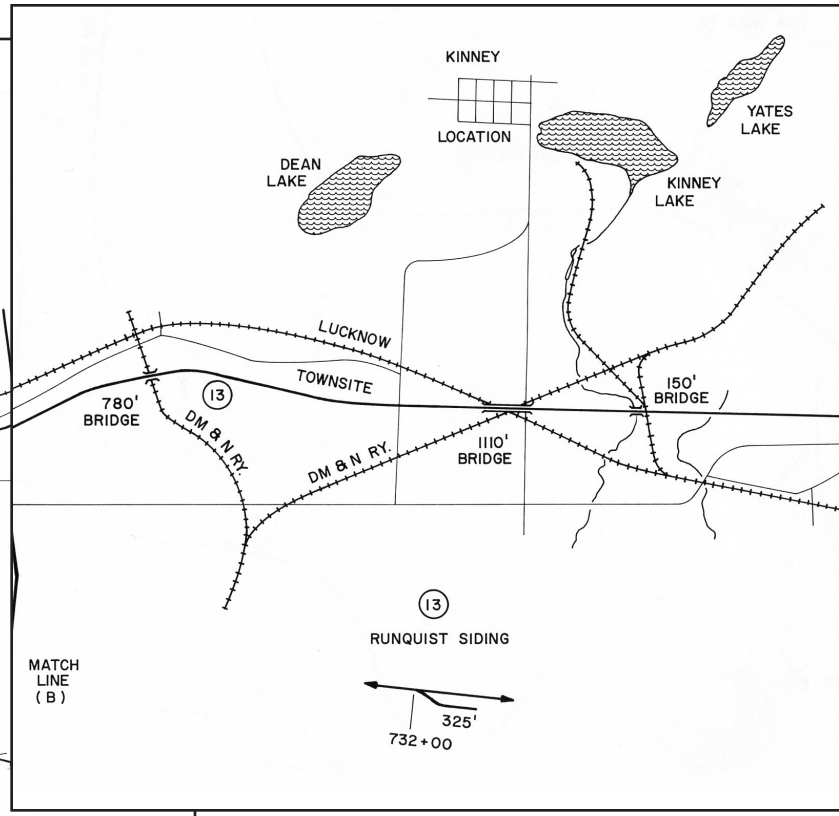
*Will run to Virginia for passengers. All trains daily.
‡Last train to carry baggage.
†Last train to Gilbert.

WEST BOUND

STATIONS	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	noon	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
GILBERT Lv.				6 00	7 00	8 00	9 00	10 00	11 00	12 00	1 00	2 00	3 00	4 00	5 0
GENOA				6 08	7 08	8 08	9 08	10 08	11 08	12 08	1 08	2 08	3 08	4 08	5 0
EVELETH				6 16	7 16	8 16	9 16	10 16	11 16	12 16	1 16	2 16	3 16	4 16	5
VIRGINIA	5 00			6 35	7 35	8 35	9 35	10 35	11 35	12 35	1 35	2 35	3 35	4 35	5
OLIVER SHOPS	5 05			6 40	7 40	8 40	9 40	10 40	11 40	12 40	1 40	2 40	3 40	4 40	5
OLCOTT PARK	5 06		5 41	6 41	7 41	8 41	9 41	10 41	11 41	12 41	1 41	2 41	3 41	4 41	5
HANNA	5 13		5 51	6 51	7 51	8 51	9 51	10 51	11 51	12 51	1 51	2 51	3 51	4 51	5
MT IRON	5 15		5 54	6 54	7 54	8 54	9 54	10 54	11 54	12 54	1 54	2 54	3 54	4 54	5
KINROSS	5 20		6 03	7 03	8 03	9 03	10 03	11 03	12 03	1 03	2 03	3 03	4 03	5 03	6
KINNEY	5 29		6 12	7 12	8 12	9 12	10 12	11 12	12 12	1 12	2 12	3 12	4 12	5 12	6
LUCKNOW	5 30		6 13	7 13	8 13	9 13	10 13	11 13	12 13	1 13	2 13	3 13	4 13	5 13	6
SHARON	5 32		6 15	7 15	8 15	9 15	10 15	11 15	12 15	1 15	2 15	3 15	4 15	5 15	6
BUHL	5 36		6 20	7 20	8 20	9 20	10 20	11 20	12 20	1 20	2 20	3 20	4 20	5 20	6
CROXTON			6 25	7 25	8 25	9 25	10 25	11 25	12 25	1 25	2 25	3 25	4 25	5 25	6
MEYERS			6 30	7 30	8 30	9 30	10 30	11 30	12 30	1 30	2 30	3 30	4 30	5 30	6
CHISHOLM		5 34	6 34	7 34	8 34	9 34	10 34	11 34	12 34	1 34	2 34	3 34	4 34	5 34	6
LAVINIA		5 43	6 43	7 43	8 43	9 43	10 43	11 43	12 43	1 43	2 43	3 43	4 43	5 43	6
HIBBING		5 52	6 52	7 52	8 52	9 52	10 52	11 52	12 52	1 52	2 52	3 52	4 52	5 52	6
HIBBING Y Ar.		5 56	6 56	7 56	8 56	9 56	10 56	11 56	12 56	1 56	2 56	3 56	4 56	5 56	6

*Last train to Hibbing. †Last train to carry baggage. All trains daily.
Connections made with steam railroads as shown below.
VIRGINIA—Duluth, Missabe & Northern; Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific; Duluth & Ir
HIBBING—Duluth, Missabe & Northern; Great Northern. EVELETH—Duluth, M





These maps originally appeared in Electric Railways of Minnesota. They're stitched together here to give you a better idea of the middle portion of the route.

ture was included. A system of outside signal lights operated in conjunction with the Simmen system were used in Hibbing and Gilbert because the terminals were located on paved streets where the third rails could not be

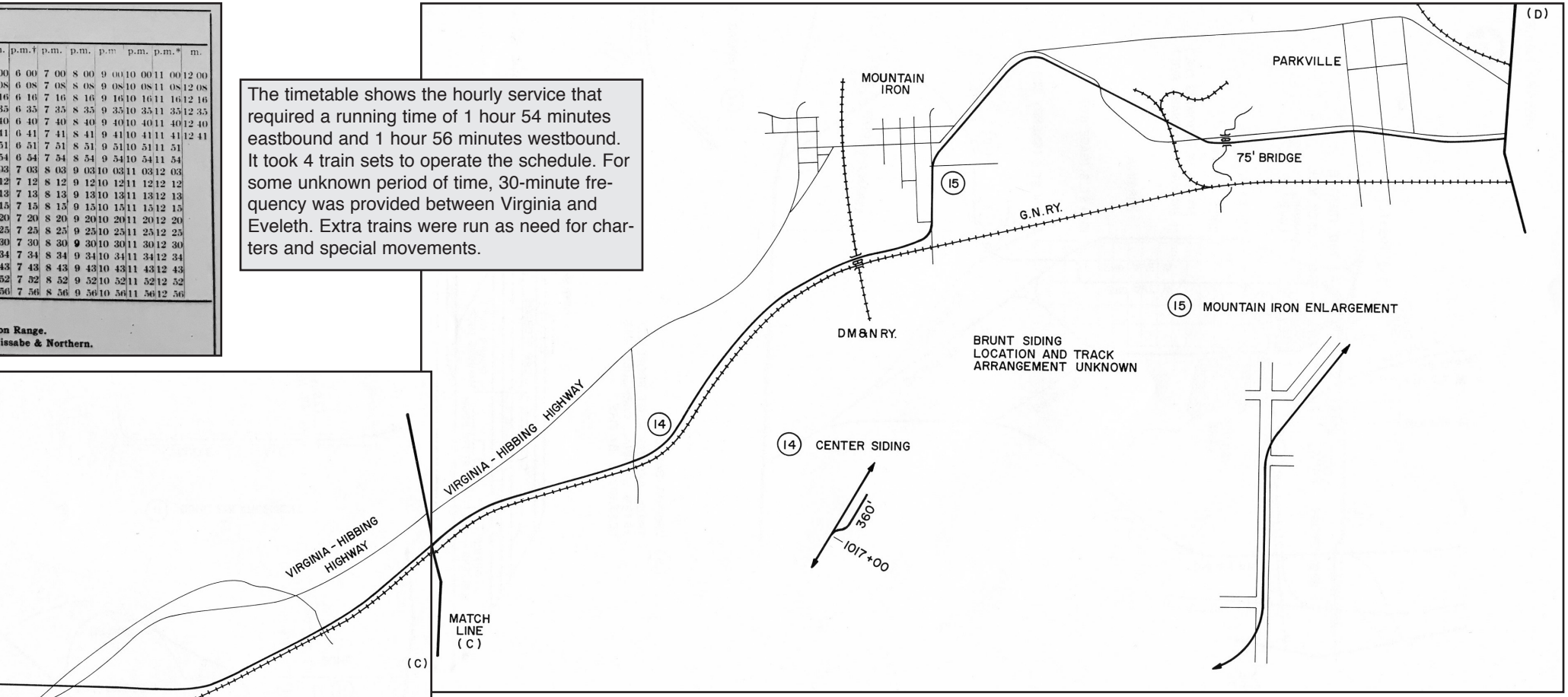
installed. Us
tually disco
removed.

On Nove
water heate
exploded, th

	p.m.†	p.m.	p.m.	p.m	p.m.	p.m.*	m.
00	6 00	7 00	8 00	9 00	10 00	11 00	12 00
08	6 08	7 08	8 08	9 08	10 08	11 08	12 08
16	6 16	7 16	8 16	9 16	10 16	11 16	12 16
35	6 35	7 35	8 35	9 35	10 35	11 35	12 35
40	6 40	7 40	8 40	9 40	10 40	11 40	12 40
41	6 41	7 41	8 41	9 41	10 41	11 41	12 41
51	6 51	7 51	8 51	9 51	10 51	11 51	
54	6 54	7 54	8 54	9 54	10 54	11 54	
03	7 03	8 03	9 03	10 03	11 03	12 03	
12	7 12	8 12	9 12	10 12	11 12	12 12	
13	7 13	8 13	9 13	10 13	11 13	12 13	
15	7 15	8 15	9 15	10 15	11 15	12 15	
20	7 20	8 20	9 20	10 20	11 20	12 20	
25	7 25	8 25	9 25	10 25	11 25	12 25	
30	7 30	8 30	9 30	10 30	11 30	12 30	
34	7 34	8 34	9 34	10 34	11 34	12 34	
43	7 43	8 43	9 43	10 43	11 43	12 43	
52	7 52	8 52	9 52	10 52	11 52	12 52	
56	7 56	8 56	9 56	10 56	11 56	12 56	

on Range.
issabe & Northern.

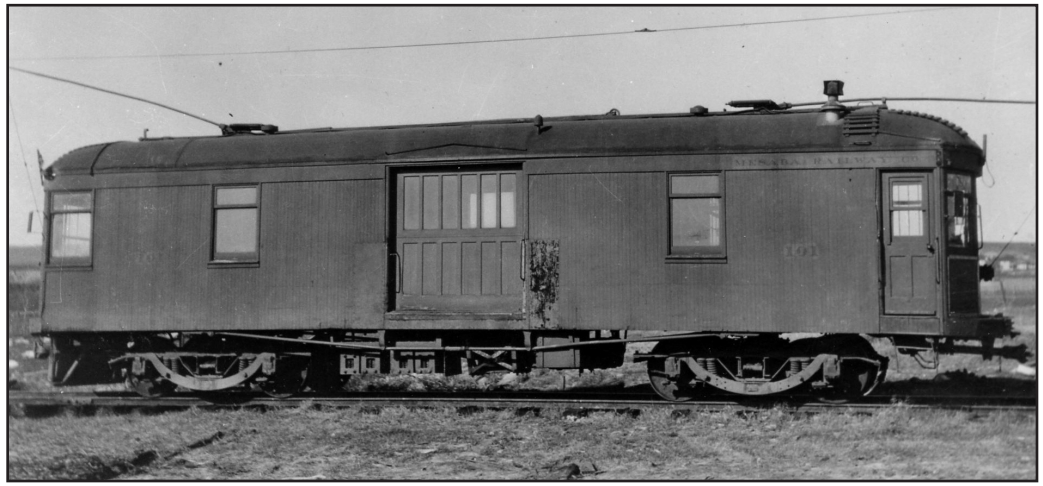
The timetable shows the hourly service that required a running time of 1 hour 54 minutes eastbound and 1 hour 56 minutes westbound. It took 4 train sets to operate the schedule. For some unknown period of time, 30-minute frequency was provided between Virginia and Eveleth. Extra trains were run as need for charters and special movements.



FAST FREIGHT AND EXPRESS SERVICE

LEAVE	a. m.	p. m.
Hibbing		2 01
Chisholm		2 30
Buhl		3 00
Mt. Iron		3 35
Virginia	10-20	4 20
Eveleth	10 45	4 45
Genoa	10 51	4 51
Gilbert Ar.	10 56	4 56

LEAVE	a. m.	p. m.
Gilbert	11 01	5 01
Genoa	11 06	5 06
Eveleth	11 14	5 14
Virginia	11 55	5 55
Mt. Iron	12 28	
Buhl	12 55	
Chisholm	1 25	
Hibbing Ar.	1 50	



Right: Express motor #101 was one of a pair that ran the twice daily express and package service.

se of this system was even-
ntinued and the equipment

ember 26, 1913, the hot-
r in a passenger motor car
he car being inside the car-

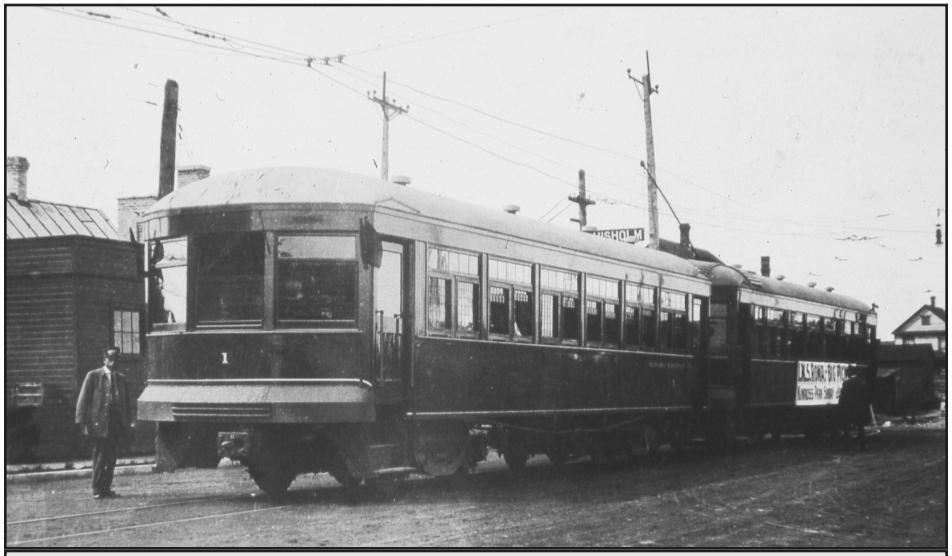
Although the Mesaba's Chisholm depot was at the other end of the main street, we have multiple photos like this one that show passengers boarding at the Hotel Kelly at the top of the hill. Minnesota Discovery Center collection.

house. The resulting fire completely destroyed the carhouse building, adjoining office building, and the following equipment: passenger motor car 13, passenger-baggage motor cars 15-18, express-freight motor car 101, and passenger trailer 7. (The trucks from 7 were salvaged.) The loss was entirely covered by insurance so identical replacements were ordered from Niles Car Co. for all of the cars except passenger trailer 7, which was never replaced. These cars were received during March through June, 1914, and bore the same numbers as their predecessors. (Cars 13, 16-18 were listed as of steel construction while 15 was of semi-steel construction.) On April 9, 1914, passenger motor car 12 was destroyed by fire about 2 A.M., also caused by explosion of the hot water heater. The loss was covered by insurance so a replacement car was ordered from Niles Car Co. However the sec-

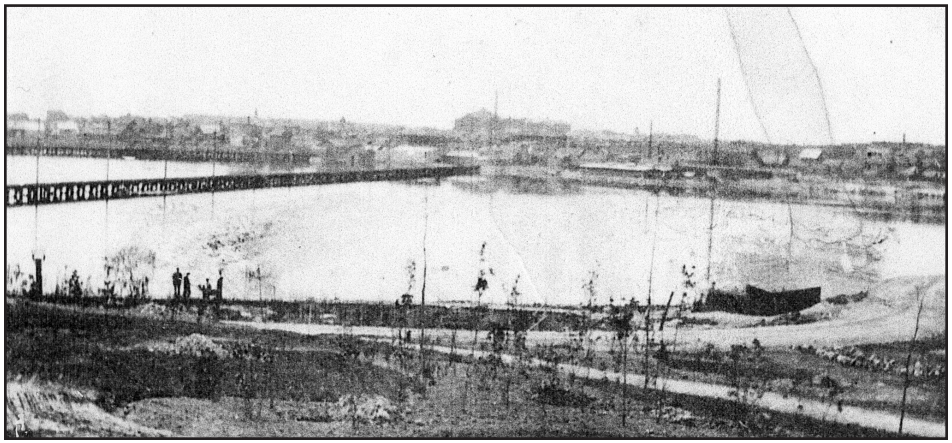
Lake Street, Chisholm's main drag, was bookended by hotels at the top and bottom of the hill. That trolley wire is pretty slack. Maybe it tightened up when the weather got cold.

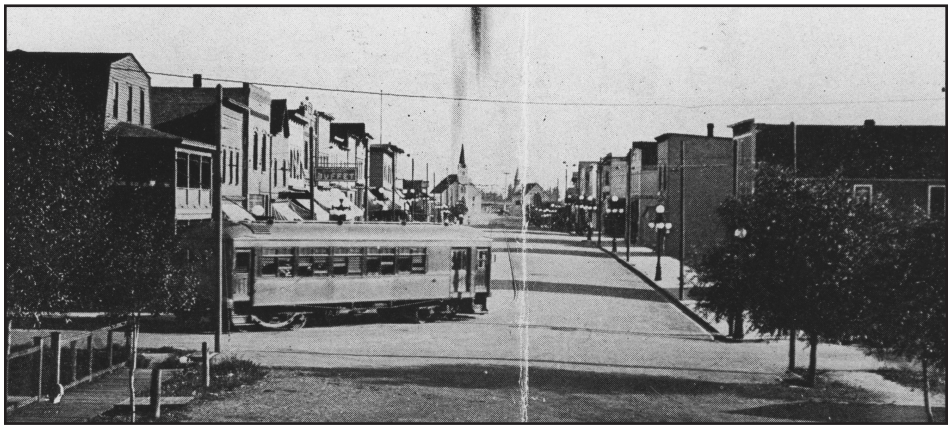
ond 12 was a passenger-baggage motor car. Meanwhile a temporary frame structure had been erected over the two pit tracks inside the burned-out shell of the carhouse for servicing and maintaining the equipment until construction of the new building was nearly completed in the summer of 1914. The new office and carhouse buildings were similar in size and design to the original buildings with two exceptions: a flat concrete roof was placed on the carhouse, and the office building was physically separate from the carhouse. A paint shop building was built during the summer, 1914; one track ran through the building with a steel rolling door at each end.

During 1914 the company constructed two work-flat motor cars (200-201) in the Virginia shops. Passenger trailer 5 was converted into a parlor car during 1914; in 1920 it again became a regular passenger trailer.

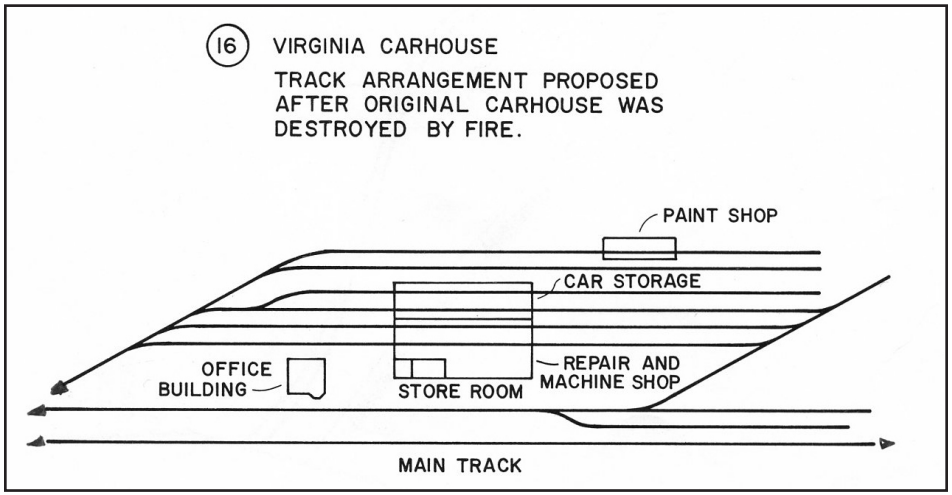


Above: The Chisholm depot was located at the corner of 1st and Chestnut, just before turning right to cross Longyear Lake on a long trestle, seen below. Aubin Studio photo.
Below: The Longyear Lake trestle. Iron Range Historical Society collection.





The Virginia shops suffered a major fire in 1913 and had to be rebuilt.



A territory almost as rich in iron ore deposits and growing towns lay both to the east and west of the existing terminals of the line. It was intended to extend the line to serve these communities and to ultimately develop a power and lighting business in the entire territory. However it was announced on February 16, 1913, that the construction of the projected westward extension to Grand Rapids would be delayed for some time. No additional construction was ever undertaken. During 1916 a bus line began operating between Virginia and Aurora. The Mesaba Ry. rented one bus from this company and operated it during the three summer months between Gilbert and Biwabik (the site

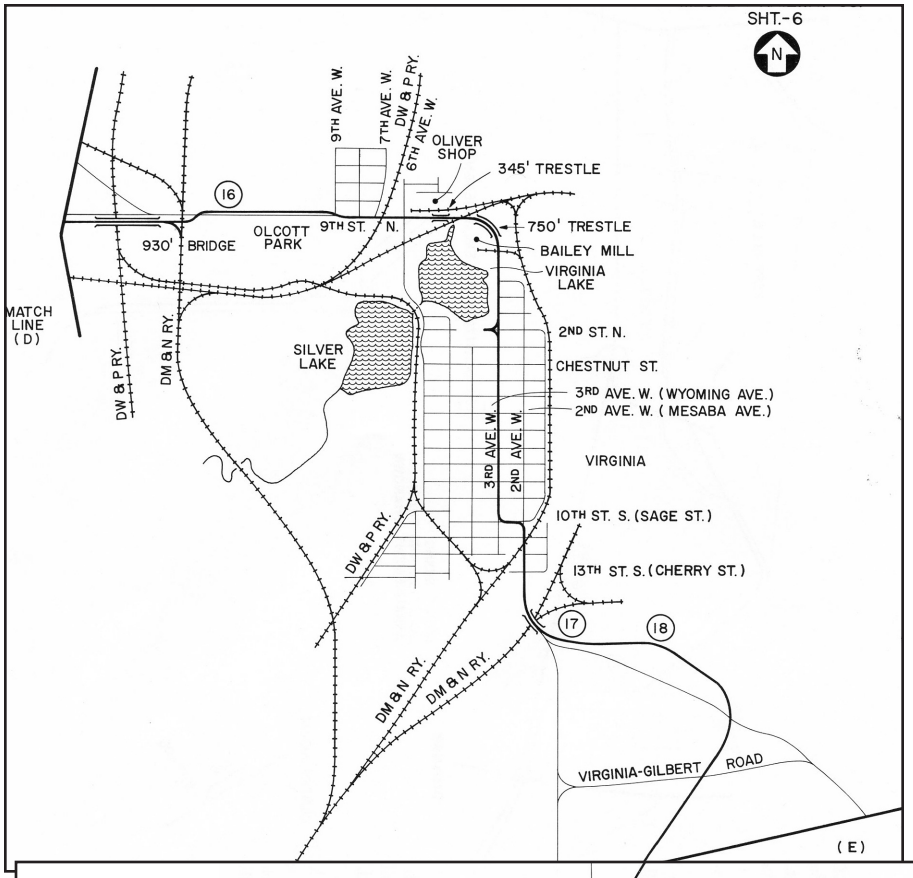
Left: A westbound car turns from Culver Avenue onto State Street in Buhl. Minnesota Discovery Center collection.

of the second iron ore discovery by the Merritt brothers in August, 1891) but discontinued the operation as it proved unprofitable.

The Mesaba Railway was re-incorporated in Massachusetts and purchased the assets of the Minnesota corporation of the same name in July, 1914. By 1918 the power station in Virginia had been leased to the Great Northern Power Co. (later the Minnesota Power & Light Co.) and the A.C. was purchased from them.

The Hull-Rust mine of Oliver Iron Mining Co. had grown steadily and soon surrounded Hibbing on three sides. Discovery that the rich ore deposits continued underneath the city led to the decision to physically move a substantial number of the buildings to a new site to the south, then known as Alice. The relocation was started in 1919 and was well along by 1921. The remaining portion of the original location was called North Hibbing while the new site was renamed South Hibbing, although the entire area was within the city limits of Hibbing. This relocation affected the Mesaba Ry. in that a major portion of its line between Hibbing and Chisholm interfered with the expanded mining operations. Provisions in the right-of-way easements with the mining companies included a ninety-day notice of cancellation of right-of-way privileges when such mining interference occurred. It thus became necessary to build a new line between Hibbing and Chisholm if the company was to remain in business. Because of labor and material shortages caused by war conditions, Oliver Iron Mining Co. agreed to furnish labor and materials to construct the new line for which Mesaba Ry. agreed to issue bonds to Oliver to cover the amount expended. During the 1919 to 1921 period a total of 8.19 miles of new line was construct-

Above: On the northwest side of Virginia, the interurban crossed the DM&N tracks alongside the Oliver Mining Company shops. Below: The line followed Wyoming Avenue (now 3rd Avenue W.) through Virginia. Note the waiting station at left. Virginia Historical Society collection.



Car 10 turns on the 2nd Street wye in Virginia. Note the sheet metal covering the pilot to create a makeshift plow.

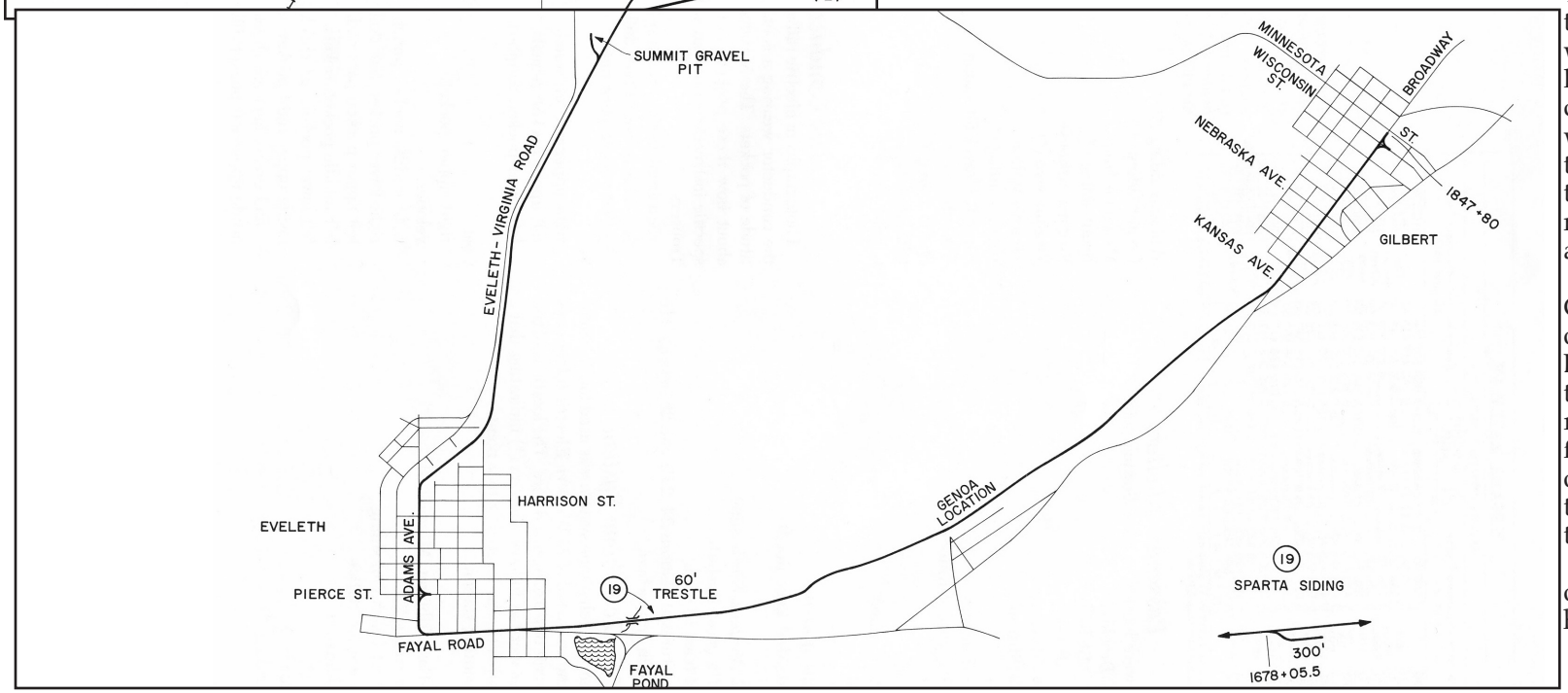
ed. About 6 miles headed east from new South Hibbing to Chisholm. Another 2 miles in Hibbing itself connected North and South Hibbing, including the stub of the old main line on 3rd Street in North Hibbing.

A terminal building was constructed at 6th Ave. and Howard St. in Hibbing containing a ticket office-waiting room, freight house, carhouse and substation. The building, which survives today as a restaurant, is constructed of concrete foundation, steel framing, brick walls and concrete roof.

The carhouse portion contained two tracks, each with a pit of sufficient length to service a 49' long car; steel rolling doors were installed at each track entrance. The substation portion contained two motor-generator sets with automatic controls.

The new Hibbing-Chisholm trackage was opened for service on December 11, 1921. The track mileage was then reported as 38.33 miles of first main track, 2.06 miles of sidings and carhouse track, and 40.39 miles total track.

By 1920 the population of Hibbing and Virginia had increased to 15,089



and 14,022 persons respectively. Passenger traffic between Virginia and Eveleth had become sufficiently heavy to warrant addition of another run so as to provide 30 minute service between the two communities. Local service was also operated in Hibbing connecting the new business district with North and South Hibbing; this service began December 11, 1921, over the newly constructed trackage using two streetcars (32-33) which had been acquired second-hand for this purpose.

The local streetcars left North Hibbing at 45 minutes past the hour, feeding the interurban that left the new South Hibbing station on the hour. It appears that all streetcars between North Hibbing and Alexander Street in South Hibbing diverted via the new downtown and the waiting station.

In the interurban timetable that appears on page 12, it says that the interurbans didn't terminate at the Hibbing station, but continued to the "Hibbing Y" at the corner of Howard and 1st Avenue (see page 6).

Station agents were originally located at Hibbing, Chisholm, Buhl, Mountain Iron, Eveleth and Gilbert. By the early 1920's the number of agents and facilities had been expanded. Agents operating from company-owned buildings were located at Hibbing (after October 1, 1920), Kitzville, Chisholm (substation building), Kinney and Mountain Iron. Agents in rented facilities were located at Hibbing (until October 1, 1920), Buhl (drug store), Virginia-North Side (grocery store), Virginia-Center (confectionary store 1913-1917; drug store 1917 onward), Eveleth, Genoa (post office and confectionary store), and Gilbert (confectionary store and ice cream parlor).

Trains meet at Thomas Siding (18 on the map), just south of Virginia on the way to Eveleth. All the meets were at single-ended sidings. The train at right will have to back onto the main line to continue. Note the company phone booth at right. Alex Ellison photo.

The Minnesota Highway Department in 1920 started a program of concrete highway construction and within a few years all-weather roads were in use between all of the communities served by the railway. With the increased use of automobiles and unregulated motor bus competition it became increasingly difficult to earn sufficient revenue to cover operating expenses, taxes, and the interest on the bonds. The company began operating at a loss in 1921. On March 7, 1924, the Mesaba Ry. was placed in receivership. As an economy move, during 1925 one-man operation of the cars was begun. The Mesaba Ry. Coach Co. was organized and purchased a fleet of buses which were operated between International Falls and Duluth, and between Hibbing and Aurora.

In early 1927 the company offered to sell the electric railway. When no response was received, the company approached Hibbing and Chisholm businessmen with the proposition that they pool their resources and purchase and operate that portion of the railway between Hibbing and Chisholm. This proposal was turned down. Persons involved with the company claimed that had the public been more friendly and the elected officials of the iron range communities more considerate, the eastern interests would have put up funds to continue the venture by purchasing equipment and facilities more capable of meeting the competitive situation. Instead the decision was made to cease all operations and dispose of the property. Accordingly the last interurban cars made their final runs April 16, 1927.

During the remainder of 1927 the property was disposed of as follows:

- Rails and overhead wire and fittings were sold to the Duluth Iron & Metal Co. for $84,300.
- Trucks and motors from all passenger, freight, trailer and flat cars sold to the Duluth Iron & Metal Co. for $5,000.
- All bridges and trestles sold to the

Elizabeth Mining Co. for $3,500.

•The Virginia carhouse and office buildings sold to the Minnesota Highway Department for $15,000.

•The Hibbing terminal building sold to the Reed-Hynes-Quinlan Co., an automobile dealer, for $16,100.

•Disposal of the property was completed in December, 1927, and the Mesaba Ry. passed into oblivion.

The following data has been abstracted from detailed information compiled by Jay Bergerson, the company's auditor, and is presented as supplementary material.

Track Construction

The original main line from Hibbing to Gilbert was laid with 70 lb. rail, except for certain sections in paved streets where 72 lb. rail was used. Carhouse tracks were laid with 60 lb. rail. The track relocation between Hibbing and Chisholm, and also in Hibbing, during 1919-1921, was laid with 100 lb. rail.

Telephone System

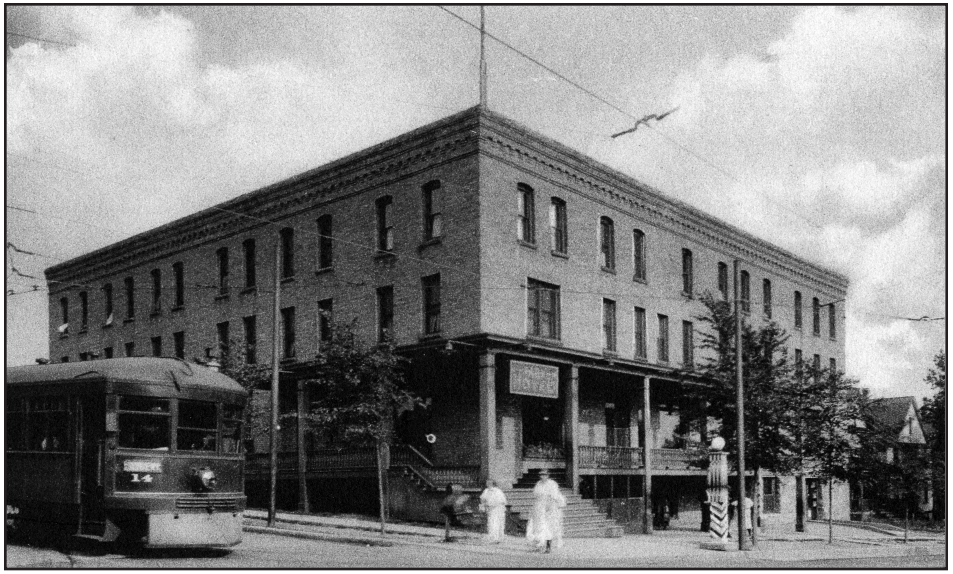
The company telephone system was used for dispatching only and consisted of 24 Western Electric telephones. Telephones were located at the passing sidings and terminal wyes.

The Simmen Signal System

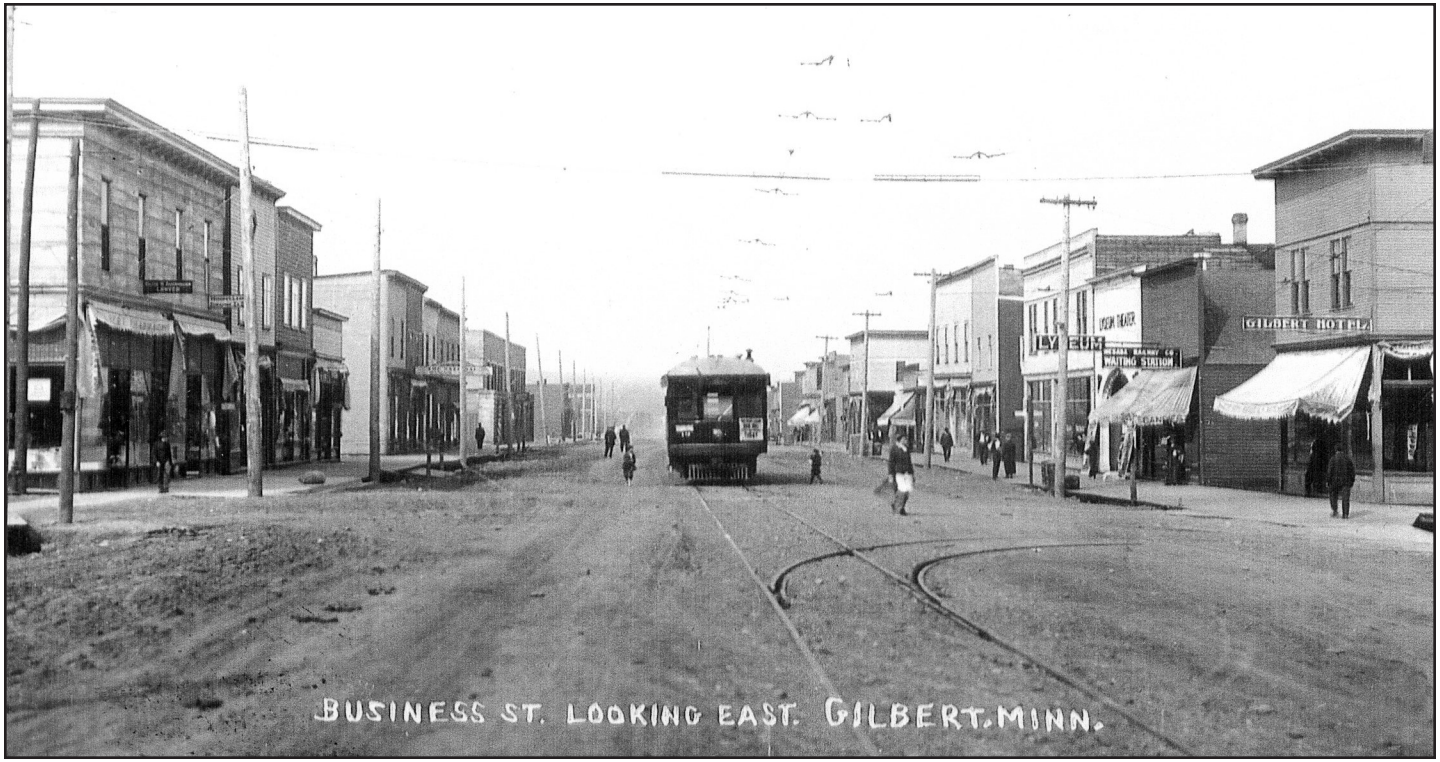
At each siding were located three insulated sections of third rail, each about 75' long. One rail was opposite the switch (home rail) and one rail 2000' in each direction from the switch (distant rails). Each group of three sections was connected by one wire (the return circuit being through the track rails) to a separate control switch on the dispatcher's control board. There was one control switch for each siding.

Each motor car was equipped with a third rail contact shoe mounted on the front truck, a contact shoe relay, battery for power, and two signal lights (red and green) in the motorman's cab.

The principle of the system was that if a contact rail was energized by the closing of a control switch, then a passing train would receive a clear signal; if a contact rail was de-energized by the opening of a control switch, then a passing train would receive a stop signal. A clear signal would continue to show while running through the block; a stop signal would be displayed until the car reached an energized contact rail. The dispatcher could at any time stop any train at any siding. Opposing movements of trains at a meeting point were controlled by the two outer third rail sections of the group, and the two trains which approached the same siding received stop signals as soon as they passed



Two views of the Park Hotel on Adams Avenue in Eveleth. It likely served as the depot. In the top photo, the car is sitting on the wye at Pierce Street.



these outer sections, leaving each train about 2000' in which to come to a stop. The dispatcher's control switches were interlocked so it was mechanically and electrically impossible for the dispatcher to give signals corresponding to a lap order, or to change signals once a train was in a block.

Maintenance of Way

Three sections were organized, each operating from an 8' x 10' section-car house. These three houses were located at the Chisholm waiting station, Mountain Iron, and the Virginia carhouse. Equipment consisted of three hand cars, three push cars, one heavy rail car, six track jacks (two on each section), and two wrecking cables.

Equipment

Passenger Motor Cars 10-11 and 13-14, built by Niles Car Company.

This group includes our Mesaba #10. The underframe was of yellow pine, reinforced with two steel I-beams under the platforms, steel plates in the center sills and steel plates in the side sills. Bodies had double maple floors, double side walls sheathed outside with steel plate and removable storm sash for the windows. Maximum speed was about 45m.p.h. The trucks are Baldwin curved equalizer 78-inch wheelbase. Our museum has acquired Japanese replicas with a 75-inch

Two scenes at the end of the line in Gilbert.
Above left: passengers are dropped off in front of the waiting station next to the Lyceum Theater. Iron Range Historical Society collection
Below left: A car backs into the wye to prepare for the next departure. If on time, the crew has 6 minutes to turn the car and board passengers before leaving.

wheelbase, so it will look pretty accurate when restored. Weight of the entire car complete was 48,400 lbs. Because a large percentage of the passengers were mine workers with soiled clothing, the interior finish was of dark oak with light blue ceiling. Hale & Kilburn rattan seats with fixed backs seated a total of 50 persons. A toilet with dry hopper was located in passenger compartment. A Peter Smith hot water heater, same as in car 265, is located in the front vestibule with an all-steel coal bunker alongside. An Ohmer fare register was located in the passenger compartment.

Passenger-Baggage Motor Cars 12 and 15-19, built by Niles Car Company.

Details are identical to those listed for the passenger motor cars except for the following differences. Length of front vestibule and baggage compartment: 9'6". Each side of the baggage compartment was fitted with a 3'6" sliding door. Seating capacity was 44 persons. The Peter Smith heater was located in the baggage compartment.

Passenger Trailers 1-4, built by Niles Car Company.

These cars were designed for double end operation with two compartments, passenger and smoking. Weight complete was about 15 tons.

Freight-Express Motor Cars 101-102, built by Niles Car Company.

City streetcars 32-33 These two cars were purchased in 1921 from the Washington-Virginia Ry. of Washington, D.C. They were originally built by the McGuire-Cummings Mfg. Co. in 1917 and were of a group of three cars acquired second-hand by the W-V Ry. in late 1918 numbered 31-33. Mesaba Ry. acquired the bodies of cars 32-33 and retained those numbers.

Disposition of Equipment

In May, 1925, two of the passenger-baggage motor cars were badly damaged in a head-on collision between Virginia and Eveleth. They were never repaired and finally scrapped in 1926.

After the end of rail operations in 1927 the company tried to sell the remaining cars to other railways, including Duluth Street Ry., but was unsuccessful. The trucks and motors (and presumably other electrical and mechanical equipment) were sold for scrap. Some of the carbodies were sold for various uses while the others were destroyed.

Life along the interurban

-Aaron Isaacs

Before the Mesaba Electric interurban was constructed, travel between the Missabe Range towns was inconvenient at best. Hibbing, Chisholm, Buhl and Virginia were connected by the Great Northern train nicknamed "The Merry Widow", which ran twice daily and not at all on Sundays. The Duluth, Missabe & Northern ran four daily round trips between Hibbing and Iron Junction, but otherwise the DM&N routes looked like branches of a tree trunk, each one serving a couple of range towns, but not connecting them with each other.

The Mesaba Electric opened in December 1912. It didn't cover the entire Range, but its 35 miles lined up most of the towns like beads on a string, Hibbing, Chisholm, Buhl, Mountain Iron, Virginia, Eveleth and Gilbert. Their combined 1910 population totaled 41,000. In between the towns were stops spaced about a mile apart. The interurbans ran hourly from 5AM to midnight.

In March 1913 the Hibbing Daily Tribune wrote in an editorial, "The interurban line in effect makes the Range one big community. More and more is this becoming evident. The people are going to buy where they have access to the best stocks at the most reasonable figures."

Spring 1913 arrived after the first few months of operation and with it thoughts of baseball. It occurred to everyone that the interurban's hourly service made it convenient for teams from each town to play each other, and for their fans to follow them. Thus the Mesaba Trolley League was organized and played its first games on May 4, 1913. This was not an isolated occurrence. Interurban construction led to the creation of trolley leagues elsewhere in the United States.

The first day matchups were:
Eveleth at Virginia
Chisholm at Hibbing
Gilbert at Biwabik (Biwabik was the only town not on the interurban)

The league folded at the end of the season. However, it apparently reformed under a different name, because later newspapers report on the games between the towns.

Baseball wasn't the only sport that the interurban enabled. In March 1913 the Interurban Bridge Club was organized in Chisholm and for the next several years card-playing meetings were held every two weeks, rotating between online towns. Separate games were scheduled for men and women. A news story later in the year notes a meeting of something called the Interurban Auction Club.

Special trains were run whenever needed. A 1918 newspaper story recounts a Virginia-Chisholm basketball game. "One hundred and fifteen Virginia rooters made the trip in an Interurban line special."

In 1913 there was a scarlet fever outbreak in Hibbing. In an attempt to prevent it from spreading to Chisholm, the local police checked everyone

The opening of the interurban made it possible for baseball teams in the different towns to play each other. The placard on the front of the car promotes one of the first set of games. Alex Ellison photo.

arriving by interurban.

In 1914 the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision prohibiting the sale of liquor in territory covered by the Chippewa Treaty of 1855. The following November the Commissioner of Indian Affairs ordered the closing of all saloons in the treaty zone, including Hibbing and Chisholm. Local opposition to the ban delayed the closing until November 29, 1915. Buhl was located just outside the zone and became the drinkers' destination. The number of saloons doubled and interurban ridership increased accordingly. That is, until January 1, 1920, when prohibition became the law of the land.

Here are some of the newspaper stories I found.

Virginia Enterprise 4-4-13

Men of the interurban made deputy sheriffs

The trainmen on the Mesaba railroad have been made deputy sheriffs and will receive their badges just as soon as the sheriff in Duluth can get the final papers signed and sent up here. There is a noticeable difference in the behavior of many of the patrons of the interurban line since the police authority was conferred on the conductors and considerably fewer drunks are now found riding the cars. Previous to the installation of the conductors as sheriffs there were many complaints of drunkenness and abusive language on the cars and some of the conductors have already used their powers to put stop to the objectional behavior of some of the worst offenders.

11-18-13 Duluth Herald

The November work of removing the big steel ski slide from its present location on the Iron Range hill to the new site on the line of the Interurban road between Virgnia and Gilbert, will be commenced within a day or two. The site is an ideal one and officials of the ski club hope to break many of the present records.

2-5-15

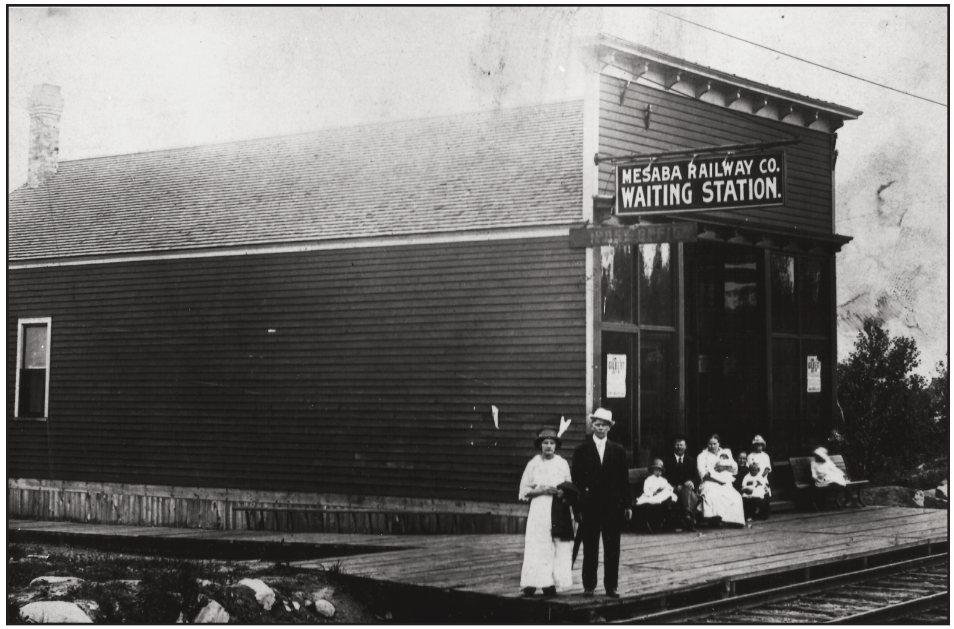
The Young Peoples' society of the Swedish Lutheran church will hike (from Virginia) *to Eveleth this evening, weather permitting, and will meet with the Eveleth Swedish Young Peoples' society. They will return on the interurban.*

Chisholm, July 23, 1914

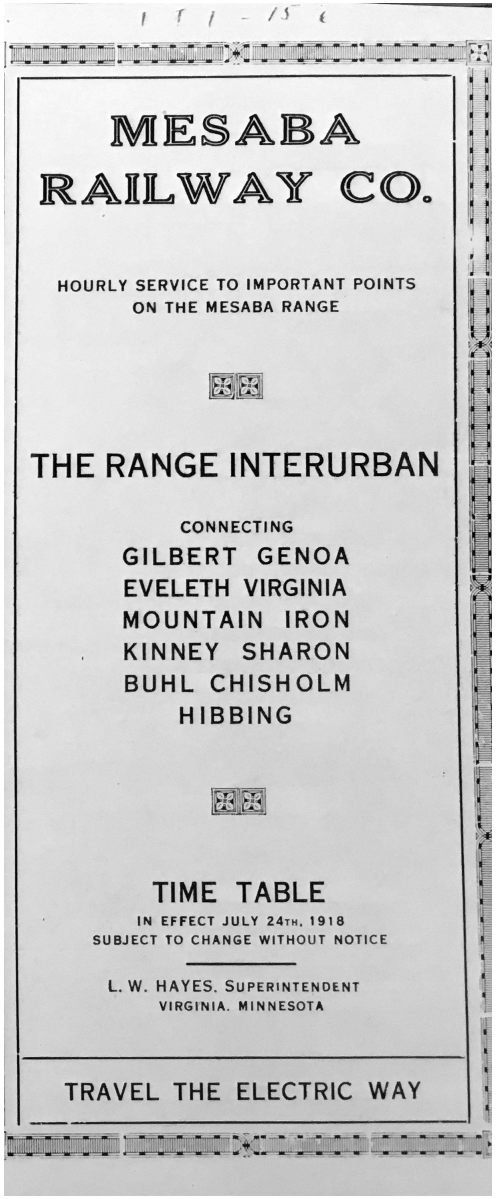
The acre patch of dense vegetation which has acquired much local fame during the past week as Longyear Lake's new floating island, after drifting for five days about the lake, has been driven by a brisk wind into almost the identical spot from which it was dislodged by the unusually high water a week ago. The island has several trees and bushes growing upon it, and is sufficiently dense to support a man, as was evidenced when one of a boating party clambered upon it, while it was floating in shallow water at the eastern side of the lake. Its slow westerly course along the interurban bridge occasioned much astonishment among passengers who had never seen an island in that vicinity before.

In 1921 the Mesaba Railway was charged with carrying a drunken passenger beyond his destination and letting him out on a trestle, where he fell 20 feet to his death. He left behind ten children.

My search through the historic newspapers online revealed that every week in the Eveleth News the Mesaba Railway published the departure times from Eveleth, and the ads always said "The Range Interurban".



We don't know which town this is, but the interurban station is sharing the building with the local post office. Virginia Historical Society collection.



Mesaba 10 looking her best in the original dark green with tan roof.. Note the third rail shoe on the front truck to activate the Simmens Signal System.

MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

PO Box 16509
Minneapolis, MN 55416-0509
www.TrolleyRide.org

August 2021

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